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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: TAIWAN'S UN REFERENDUM

¶1. Summary: As Taiwan's UN bid remained in the spotlight of the Taiwan media, news coverage on September 21 also focused on the Olympic torch relay route issue, and on the legislative and presidential elections next year. The pro-independence "Liberty Times," citing the results of a recent opinion survey by ZOGBY International of the U.S., ran a banner headline on page two that said "If the [UN] Referendum Gets Passed, 70 Percent of the Americans [Polled] Said They Will Support Taiwan's Membership in the UN."

¶2. In terms of editorials and commentaries, new TECRO Chairman Edgar Lin said in an op-ed in the "Liberty Times" that given the demonstration of the will of the Taiwan public in the recent campaigns for Taiwan's UN bid, the United States must face up to the need to systemize its channel of high-level dialogue with Taiwan. An editorial in the pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" also said this year's drive by Taiwan to push for its UN bid was significant because it has successfully drawn the international community's attention to Taiwan's cause. An editorial in the centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times," however, called on the public to be realistic about Taiwan's UN bid. The article urged Taiwan to build up its national strength and improve its relations with the United States and China first before it starts to pursue its UN bid. An editorial in the conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post," on the other hand, criticized the DPP's UN referendum as another campaign gambit of the party. End summary.

A) "Taiwan Should Go over from Defensive to Offensive in Terms of Its Foreign Relations"

TECRO (Headquarters) Chairman Edgar Lin opined in the pro-independence "Liberty Times" [circulation: 720,000] (9/21):

"... As U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Thomas Christensen said, Taiwan and the United States are strategic partners for the security and stability of East Asia, and both are closely related and interdependent on each other. Also, he said that nothing cannot be resolved as long as the two sides trust, communicate with, and understand each other. As this is the case in politics, it stands true also for foreign relations. But the question is whether the United States has indeed treated Taiwan as a closely related strategic partner? If yes, has it shown us a certain degree of respect? Or has it simply regarded Taiwan as a pawn that is expendable in the battles between powerful nations vying for supremacy?

"Given my personal diplomatic experience, the harvest reaped from, and impact on the international community caused by, the DPP's and the KMT's campaigns for Taiwan to join or re-join the UN as well as the big rally held on September 15 are the most important attack that Taiwan has launched over the past five decades. It is worth our celebration. ...

"... Given the demonstration of the will of the Taiwan public, the

United States must face squarely the matter of systemizing its channel of high-level dialogue with Taiwan. To flatter Beijing in the short term will only accelerate China's economic and military rise, which will harm the United States in the end. Since Taiwan is a closely related and interdependent strategic partner of the United States, we can demand improvement in Taiwan-U.S. relations. The movements calling for Taiwan to join or re-join the UN this time have reflected that the Taiwan people can no longer accept the current status of Taiwan-U.S. relations!"

B) "U.S. Drive Boosts Taiwan's Cause"

The pro-independence, English-language "Taiwan News" [circulation: 20,000] editorialized (9/21):

"... Despite the anticipated setback, this year's [UN] drive was uniquely significant because, for the first time, President Chen Shui-bian and the Democratic Progressive Party government issued an application to join the United Nations directly as a new member under the name of 'Taiwan.' This new effort has significantly advanced this cause, in part by sparking greater attention to the injustice of the exclusion of Taiwan from the world community and by clarifying the issues at stake for both Taiwan and the world concerning our absence from the U.N. ... Moreover, the threatening rhetoric expended by Beijing and, sadly, other nations including the United States denouncing the drive by the Taiwan people for their just democratic rights reveals the world is failing to address this problem justly. ...

"Another benefit from this year's U.N. and referendum campaign has been the consolidation of a foreign policy that has greater 'relative autonomy' from the United States, which has long been seen as Taiwan's 'patron' in the world community. While the U.S. remains Taiwan's most important substantive ally and guarantor of security, the willingness of President Chen and the DPP government to uphold

their position on the U.N. issue has punctured widespread impressions in global civil society that Taipei is a U.S. 'client' and has arguably enhanced the credibility of Taiwan's democracy and broadened support for 'democratic Taiwan' beyond past cold war alliances. ...

"Moreover, opinion polls showing nearly 70 percent of our citizens believe the referenda on Taiwan's U.N. applications should take place regardless of Washington's opposition reflect the resiliency of the Taiwan people and may be a sign that our citizens have the maturity and resolve to insist upon our rights under the U.N. Charter's own principle of universality and self-determination to join the world community despite opposition from great powers. Finally, we believe the DPP government's bid for U.N. membership under the name of Taiwan and of the ongoing referendum campaign does indeed constitute a 'declaration,' but not of a wholly unnecessary 'formal independence' feared in Washington and Beijing. ..."

C) "[Taiwan's] UN Bid Can Be Viewed and Managed as a 'Genuine Topic'"

The centrist, KMT-leaning "China Times" [circulation: 400,000] editorialized (9/21):

"... Having gone through the 'road to UN' this year, anyone with a clear mind must have seen through a fact: The issue regarding Taiwan's UN bid has never had anything to do with international righteousness and justice; instead, it is a matter conditioned from head to toe by international reality and politics. In other words, Taiwan's UN bid is not a question about whether it 'should' join the UN or not, nor it is about whether the issue is 'reasonable' or not. On the contrary, it is a question of whether it is 'allowed' to do so or not. Taiwan's situation is a product structured by strong powers like the United States and China via a series of bilateral and multilateral agreements such as the UN resolutions and the three communiqués. Taiwan's destiny is determined [by other powers] and cannot possibly be changed by the results of one or two referenda. Under the current structure and situation, the island should never expect that the international community will suddenly change its mind and support Taiwan's UN bid. ...

"A ruling team with wisdom and vision would not constantly

manipulate populist sentiment to deal with the current international policy situation head on; instead, it would skillfully take advantage of the international situation and seek the most favorable opportunity to plan its strategy. When Taiwan's relations with China become reconciliatory, its relations with the United States are those built on solid and profound mutual trust, its relations with the neighboring countries in the Asia-Pacific region are cooperative and reciprocal; and when its national competitiveness is increasing, and its trade and economic strength robust and strong, who will dare to ignore Taiwan? When Taiwan's role in regional development becomes indispensable, and when Taiwan gradually finds out how to play a critical role in the global management, its call for the 'UN bid' will become more righteous and self-assured. When that moment arrives, Taiwan can start by applying for the status of observer [in the international organizations], and one step at a time, it can work and manage solidly to win recognition of the international community. [When that happens,] who can say that the UN bid will be an impossible dream for Taiwan?"

D) "U.N. Membership Bid Another Campaign Gambit"

The conservative, pro-unification, English-language "China Post" [circulation: 30,000] editorialized (9/21):

"... The DPP's U.N. bid was thwarted again yesterday, when the world body once again rejected a proposal from Taiwan's allies to put its membership bid on the General Assembly's agenda. The rejection did not surprise anyone, including everyone in the DPP. ... This is the 15th consecutive year that Taiwan's quest for membership in the world body has been rejected. The DPP will continue with this pursuit, but it will never succeed. People with an adequate knowledge of the DPP, President Chen and Taiwan's politics are aware that the U.N. membership campaign is actually a ruse the party has devised to help its presidential candidate win the upcoming battle. ...

"President Chen has time and again promised not to seek Taiwan's independence or change the official title of the country during his term. Yet he has now broken these promises. ... Will this party continue to have enough voter support to stay put? You can't fool all the people all the time, as the saying goes."

YOUNG